

The John Birch Controversy

Quite an unusual stir has been created in recent days over an organization called the John Birch Society. The controversy concerning this organization has been full of paradoxes and contradictions.

Basic in any discussion of the John Birch Society is the fact that its stated purpose of anti-Communism is good, that many among the grass roots level of participation are sound and substantial patriots—but that the founder and national leader of the group, Robert Welch of Belmont, Mass., has been guilty of extremism, bad judgment and statements so irrational as to be termed downright wacky.

The chief function of the John Birch Society seems to have been a study of political issues through discussion and reading of society literature prepared and distributed under Welch's direction, then the writing of letters to members of Congress, newspapers and others in support of a conservative point of view.

What gave grounds for the severe criticism the John Birch Society has recently received were statements made by Welch concerning such people as President Eisenhower, the late John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, the Central Intelligence Agency head, and others. The statements by Welch charged these individuals with being a variety of Communist tools. The statements, Welch says, were made for private and strictly limited distribution. That they were made at all seems indefensible, irrational, vicious and stupid.

While there is no justification for these statements by Welch, those trying to evaluate the controversy surrounding the John Birch Society should note that the statements are not endorsed by the society. The society cannot escape the fact, however, that the same Welch who made the ridiculous charges is the Welch who is leading the John Birch effort.

But the timing of the attack on Welch is quite significant. Welch, like anyone else, deserves to be called up short for irresponsible statements. But his statements were not made only yesterday. They pre-date the

founding of the John Birch Society in 1958, and that they were made has long been known. Why, then, has the stir been created over them only in recent weeks? Examination of the situation seems to establish a pattern.

Only recently, the John Birch Society has received unusual attention by launching its most ambitious program—a campaign for the impeachment of Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren on grounds that he has violated the Constitution in many of the rulings of the court. The purpose of the campaign has seemed not so much based on belief that the drive for impeachment would be successful as it is based on the hope that by making the effort, the society would succeed in calling to the attention of the American people the many unconstitutional and Communist-favoring rulings by the court.

As this anti-Warren campaign was beginning to gain momentum, a strong attack on the John Birch Society appeared in a West Coast publication called *People's World*, which has been reported in the *Congressional Record* to have been labeled by the research staff of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee as the official organ of the Communist Party on the West Coast. The *People's World* article attacking the society appeared Feb. 25, 1961. A short time later, similar material appeared in a national news magazine. Then a senator inserted it in the *Congressional Record*. It was picked up by several newspapers. And then the current furor about the John Birch Society began to assume large proportions.

Because the John Birch Society has been attacked in the *People's World*, does not give justification for Welch's absurd charges about President Eisenhower and others. But it does show something about how the current controversy has developed.

Some of those most critical of the John Birch Society have suggested that it be subjected to congressional investigation. Now Welch himself has made such a suggestion. Perhaps that would be a proper way to arrive at the full facts on both sides and to lay them before the American people.